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(U)Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U)A mission of great importance?: Recruiting Scientists and Mathematicians at NSA, circa 1960

(U) At times in the 1950s and early 1960s, getting people to work at NSA could be easy, and, in other cases, very difficult. It probably was easier to hire people for the core cryptologic skills of cryptanalysis, traffic analysis, collection, and cryptolinguistics. Many of the people in those occupations had served in the Service Cryptologic Elements (Army Security Agency, Air Force Security Service, and the Naval Security Group). They had applied and were accepted at NSA. During this period, it is likely that the majority of people hired in the cryptologic skills came from a military background.

(U) The problem for NSA was attracting scientists, engineers, and mathematicians from universities and advanced technical centers. They most likely would have had no idea what NSA--or its mission--was. In addition, NSA recruitment practices 40 years ago were not a matter of floating advertisements in major metropolitan newspapers or holding publicly announced job fairs, and then waiting for the flood of applications. At universities, NSA recruiters would advertise their appearance in small ads posted outside career counseling offices. NSA policy was to maintain as low a profile as possible in the public landscape. The jokes about NSA standing for "No Such Agency" carried a solid vein of truth. This approach created difficulties when it came to hiring. Somehow, a balance had to be struck between describing the NSA missions and retaining security. Yet, how do you sell a career if you cannot tell the prospective employee what he or she will be doing? An example of how the Agency approached this problem can be found in the brochure that it developed to recruit engineers, scientists, and mathematicians around 1960. Up front it should be stated that there are no reliable statistics regarding the effectiveness of this brochure. In fact, overall personnel levels at NSA from 1958 to 1961 actually declined slightly. What the brochure does is provide some insight into how NSA presented itself to the public: its mission, the skills necessary to achieve its mission, and the environment in which prospective employees would work.

(U) The brochure is titled "A Challenging Future." On the front cover there is a design that is representative of one of then current vogues in public relations for abstract-like art: geometric figures arranged in a manner that suggests movement in some direction, in this case, upwards. The brochure's foreword maintains discreteness when mentioning NSA's

major missions of SIGINT and COMSEC. Instead it identifies the agency as "a major research and development facility of the U.S. Department of Defense." It adds that "all applicants must be United States citizens, and are subject to a character and loyalty investigation as well as an appropriate physical examination." The foreword says that NSA "is in the forefront" of the solution of "practical problems," and that the individual will be engaged in a mission of "great significance to our country." The closest the brochure comes to admitting to anything is the last paragraph, in which it states that "Although NSA is necessarily restricted to a select portion of our national scientific community, this brochure outlines its unclassified activities." In one of the more interesting understatement contained in the brochure, NSA is described as "a unique organization."

(U) The body of the brochure is aimed at three main occupations: engineers, mathematicians, and physicists. It outlines the major technical programs that applicants might be engaged in: general-purpose computer equipment, systems simulation studies, computer components, radio equipment, recording devices, and auxiliary communications devices. The brochure contains photographs of scientific "types" of the day, dressed in the stereotypical "technical uniform": white shirt, thin black tie (or bow tie if one was eccentric), and white lab coat. They are posing with the usual panoply of scientific props such as spectrum analyzers, electron microscopes, environmental testers, early computers, and a blackboard filled with scientific notations. Another picture is of an early circuit board, filled with bulky transistors, diodes, and capacitors - an example of the then state-of-the-art technology. The brochure's accompanying text is fairly routine and bland. It consists mostly of descriptions of the various types of systems and equipment that the applicants might be developing or testing. At no point is there any hint - even a subtle one - that there might "be more" to a particular field of study or research.

(U) The brochure also contains information on NSA's location. It includes a drawing of the only building then in existence - OPS 1. It also located the Agency near the "brand new" Baltimore-Washington Parkway, which opened in 1957. It refers to the building as the third largest in the metropolitan area, complete with three banks of escalators, a drug store, barbershop, and bank. The brochure also makes the point that NSA was air-conditioned, a claim that few federal buildings at the time could make, a plus in the subtropical summer weather of the metropolitan area.

(U) Of course, NSA scientists were not all work and no play; they had to be sold on a number of other issues regarding life at NSA. Some extra "hooks" were needed. So the brochure contains sections on opportunities such as the college training program, fellowships, and advanced studies, all at local colleges and universities. Furthermore, the Agency states in the brochure that it would pay the tuition costs. There is also the standard reference to government employee benefits of life and health insurance and leave. The brochure also highlights the benefits of living in the Washington-Baltimore area, especially the Chesapeake Bay. It has pictures of the usual local monuments, but it also has shots of sailing on the bay, pleasant suburban housing tracts, and scenes from the activities

sponsored by the NSA Recreation Association: employee dances and sporting events among others.

(U) Again, it is not certain if this brochure was an effective tool for the recruitment of scientists and engineers. The significance of "A Challenging Future" was not the oblique discussion of the NSA mission. Rather, the recruiting brochure is remarkable in that it presented NSA in a fashion that made it appear not much different from other government agencies, private industry, and research organizations of the time.

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